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DIFFICULTIES  
OF THE  
DEAF AND DUMB  
IN  
LEARNING LANGUAGE,  
By COLLINS STONE.  
—  
1854.

# COLUMBIA INSTITUTION

—FOR THE—

DEAF AND DUMB

THE CHARLES BAKER COLLECTION

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ON THE

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

BY

THE DEAF AND DUMB

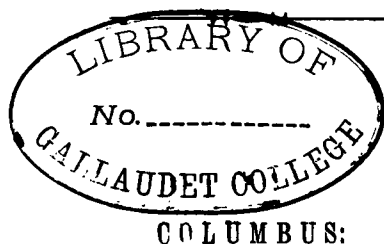
IN

LEARNING LANGUAGE.

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BY COLLINS STONE,

SUPERINTENDENT OF THE OHIO INSTITUTION FOR THE DEAF AND DUMB.



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## ON THE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY THE DEAF AND DUMB IN LEARNING LANGUAGE.

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BY COLLINS STONE.

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It is both amusing and instructive to notice the different impressions which are sometimes made upon visitors at our Institutions for the education of the Deaf and Dumb. One class of visitors, observing the animated countenances of our pupils, and the ease and rapidity with which they execute the tasks assigned them, seem to suppose that their knowledge is boundless, and that they are equal to any work within the scope of human attainment. Accordingly, if requested to give an exercise, or to propose a question, to exhibit the skill of the pupils, they are quite as likely to propound a problem that would puzzle ARISTOTLE himself to solve, as to hit upon something that is within the pupils' ability. Another class are so deeply impressed with the previous ignorance of the Deaf and Dumb, and the difficulty of communicating with them, as to be greatly surprised that they can be taught anything. The most simple exercises fill them with delight and admiration. There is occasionally still another class of visitors, and their presence is always welcomed by the teacher, who, being able intelligently to appreciate the difficulties with which the Deaf Mute has to contend in the process of his education, can form a proper judgment of the degree in which, at any particular stage in his course, he may be expected to have overcome them, and of the progress he has actually made.

It has long been a source of regret with the most able and experienced Instructors of Deaf Mutes, that the results of education which are attained in our Institutions, are to so great an extent incomplete and partial; that the grand end at which we aim, the free and accurate use of language, is so seldom reached; and that a large portion of our pupils, when they leave school, are so imperfectly acquainted with that which must be to them the medium of communication with the world in which they live, and which should be the vehicle of thought and of mental activity. We are nevertheless fully persuaded, that when the obstacles which lie in the way of the Deaf Mute, as he attempts the acquisition of language, are duly estimated, in their number, variety and magnitude, the true ground of wonder will be the progress actually made, and the success which is attained by them in the work. We propose briefly to notice some of the difficulties to which allusion has been made.

These difficulties arise from two sources: the peculiar condition of the mind of the Deaf Mute when he commences his education; and the peculiar nature of the science he essays to learn. It is an obvious principle, and it has no exception, that the lower the grade of the intellect which you propose to educate, the more inert, stupid and feeble its native powers, the more arduous is the work in hand. To explain, for example, supposing the subject to be new in both cases, the manner in which the annual revolutions of the earth effects the changes of the seasons, so as to make the subject entirely clear to the mind of ISAAC NEWTON, is a very different labor from that of making the same subject clear to the mind of a Hottentot, or a Siamese. In the one case, the mind is quick to catch the



operation of general laws, the connection between cause and effect, and the results that would follow from real or supposed relations. In the other, relations, causes and results, that are distinctly and repeatedly stated and explained, are not recognized; the attention is unexcited, and the ability even, to pass from effect back to cause, is yet to be developed in the mind.

When the work of education commences with a person who is congenitally deaf, the mind is a barren, untrodden waste, upon which the light of intellectual life can scarcely be said to have dawned. The great facts of human existence and human history, which fill all minds but his, and whose waves surge and swell over the ocean of thought throughout the world, are entirely unknown to him. If indeed the problem were given, to place a human being, not idiotic, in such a position that while living and moving among men, he should at the same time have the least possible amount of knowledge, and his mind make the nearest possible approach to a blank, it would be solved by placing him in society, and shutting his ears, from birth, to the sound of the human voice. This is precisely the condition in which we find the Deaf Mute.

The wild and ferocious savage is generally regarded as an uncultivated and ignorant being. Let us measure for a moment, his mental state with that of the uneducated Mute. What does this savage know? The wanderings, the valiant deeds, and eventful history of his forefathers, the accumulated experience of his tribe, the results of his own long-continued observation of animals, plants and things, constantly corrected by the observation of his companions, the existence and power of the Great Spirit, and the blessed hunting grounds beyond the sky, are all por-

tions of his mental furniture. In wreaking his vengeance on his enemies, or escaping from their toils, in feats of dexterity, or in the pursuit and capture of his game, his mind is often stirred to the keenest activity, and all his resources of cunning, invention, and forecast, are called forth. More than all, and this is the great secret of his superiority, he has constant mental contact with his fellow, which sharpens his perceptions, excites his curiosity, stimulates his mind, and leads it forth into a thousand channels. It is only the rough contact of the flint with the steel, that elicits the spark; and it is the mutual attrition of one mind upon another, that more than any thing else, wakes up the intellect to action. Of this, the Mute has nothing. Compared with the uneducated Mute, the savage is a man of vast acquirements, and of profound wisdom. The Mute's knowledge is bounded by his own careless and limited observation, and his mind has never been aroused to any process of reasoning.

Besides this vacuity of facts and truths, upon which, if possessed, the intellect might exercise its powers, there is in the Deaf Mute, the mental impotency induced by long-continued inaction. This, to him, is a very serious matter. Activity is the law of life, both in matter and mind. The air retains its vitality, only while it maintains its ceaseless motion. Let the sap of a tree cease its flow, and the tree dies, and hastens to decay. Water, if it remains at rest but a short period, stagnates and putrefies. Let the arm be fixed in one position, and how long will its muscles retain their elasticity and power? So if the faculties of the mind are entirely without exercise, if the reasoning faculties are unexcited, if the memory is never summoned to bring forth its stores, nor the judgment to use its scales,

nor the faculties of invention and forecast to exhibit their skill, these various powers will practically have no existence. After this state of inaction has continued for a certain period, there is no susceptibility in the mind for calling them into exercise. They seem to be not dormant but dead.

A partial illustration of this fact, is seen in the case of many persons who have good native powers, and the use of all their faculties. When the opportunities of education are deferred to a somewhat late period in life, it is found that the lack of early instruction can never be supplied. The most persevering diligence fails to give a correct orthography or use either of spoken or written language. Yet, by the strange carelessness, in some instances through the *cupidity* of his friends, it not unfrequently happens, that the Deaf Mute, with all his peculiar disadvantages, must at this period begin his difficult task.

It should also be considered that the education of the Deaf Mute ends, nearly at the point where that of the child in our common school begins. The latter, with a mind whose every faculty is quickened by exercise, and stored with a knowledge more or less minute of the nature and relations of things around him, and of the general outlines of truth; with a curiosity sharpened by intimations and glimpses of the wonders in the midst of which he lives, and above all, with the great framework of language in his possession, which will unlock for his inspection all the treasures of science, and art, and history, eagerly enters upon the work of following out the principles, which are already in his mind, to their higher and grander applications and results.

Far removed from this, is the process of education to the Deaf Mute. He has every thing to learn, and the very agent by which his acquisitions must be made, is in a dormant and palsied state. There are, indeed, some instances in which the perceptive faculties are more or less active, before the pupil enters the Institution for instruction; cases in which the imprisoned mind has begun to cast painfully about for some glimpses of light to dispel its darkness; but with much the greater number, the teacher must commence his work upon ignorance and mental imbecility. The faculties by the cultivation of which the education of the Mute is to progress, and be consummated with success, must be aroused from their sleep, and almost created by his skillful touch.

Let us now turn to the nature of the work, upon which, under these circumstances, the Deaf Mute enters. If the real difficulty of a task is to be measured by the correspondence that the work to be done bears to the means by which it is to be accomplished, we are strongly inclined to the opinion that the human mind, in the most mature and vigorous exercise of its powers, is seldom called to a work equally arduous with that which is here imposed upon him. It is, first and chiefly, acquiring a knowledge of the English tongue; of its laws of construction, of the meaning and use of its words and phrases. This, indeed, presents no difficulty to the hearing child. Unconsciously, and without reflection or effort, he has learned it, by hearing it from infancy, and frequent repetition has engrafted its forms, however singular and arbitrary, upon his understanding and memory. But how is the Deaf Mute to acquire it? With the mind of an infant, even though it may belong to an adult individual, he can only learn language by study-

ing and understanding its structure and arrangement. If there is such a science as the "philosophy of language," he must acquire it. By the careful analysis of his teacher, he must become familiar with its simplest elements; and then, by an equally careful use of the synthetical process, he must learn correctly to combine these elements, to express the various ideas and shades of thought, current and recognized among men. The varied forms of speech, and the signification of words, in which usage alone points out the definite meaning, he must learn, for the most part, each by itself; availing himself, in the multiplied anomalies with which he meets, of classification, where it is possible, and of association, either natural or accidental; in the thousand cases where both these resources fail him, he is thrown back upon a sheer effort of memory.

The task for the Deaf Mute, is incomparably greater than that of the student who is learning a foreign language. Making no account of the difference in mental cultivation, the scholar has the aid of the ear, and he has one written and spoken language, with its multiplied analogies in structure, and forms of expression, to assist him in acquiring another, in many respects similar. But even when the mind of the Mute is aroused to reflection, and ideas flow in upon him, waiting for their proper expression, when he has advanced so far as to be able, in some sort, to attach names to these ideas, neither the ideas nor the words marshal themselves in the inverted and arbitrary forms of written language, but in forms exceedingly opposite and diverse.

The additional labor in acquiring language which the want of the ear imposes, will be seen by a single illustra-

tration, and we purposely select the simplest possible. Take the change of termination which denotes the singular and plural. Any discrepancy between the number of the subject and the verb, though separated ever so widely by intervening members of the sentence, jars immediately upon the ear of the hearing person, and at once reveals the error. But the ear of the Deaf Mute receives no shock, from the most glaring violations of propriety in this particular, and one form appears as symmetrical to his eye, as the other. He must however *obey the rule*; and keeping this in his mind, he patiently scans his sentence, word by word, to see if the terminations answer the required conditions. This illustrates one of the many cases constantly occurring, in which the ear would instantly detect an error in grammar, but which the Mute can only discern by the careful examination by his eye, and the application of a principle for which he knows no other reason than the authority of his instructor.

The changes made in the form of the verb to denote time, are at first a source of great perplexity to the Deaf Mute. Take for example the past definite and indefinite tenses. If he wishes to say to his friend that he has often read over his letter with great satisfaction, he is taught the proper form, and writes, "I have often read over your letter with great pleasure." But if he wishes to say that he enjoyed that pleasure the day previous, he must not write, "I have often read your letter yesterday"—by introducing a small word which fixes the time, he finds that he must change still further the structure of the sentence. Difficulties like these, which seem to us so trifling, arising from the expression of number and time, the use of connectives, particles and qualifying words, are no trifles

to him. Unless there is a good degree of mental sharpness, they are seldom fully overcome. Where there is however, the power of discrimination and attention, these are soon mastered. Others much more formidable await him.

We have already intimated that it is the structure of our language, especially its idiomatic phrases, and the peculiar meaning of words which usage sanctions, that constitutes, to the Deaf Mute, the great difficulty of its acquisition. A few of these peculiarities we will enumerate.

The important distinction between the transitive and intransitive verb, is early impressed upon the pupil; not the *name*, but the real distinction in meaning and use. He is taught that in the first class, the action passes directly over to its object; that in the latter class, it does not; and that when an object follows a verb of the latter class, a preposition must intervene. In many cases, however, essentially the same idea is expressed by two verbs, one of which has the transitive, and the other the intransitive form.\* We tell, and say to, a person: begin, and enter upon, a work; pursue, and run after, an animal; desire, and wish for, an object; reach, and arrive at, a place. These different forms, are to the Deaf Mute, names for the same idea, and he is not only puzzled to know why the preposition should be used in the one case, and not in the other, but is constantly mistaking its use, by attaching it to the wrong word.

Besides, the common meaning which a word bears, as it stands alone, it often combines with other words, in a way

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\* In noticing these peculiarities of the language, I have availed myself freely of an admirable article by Prof. BARNARD, on the "Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb." Quar. Chris. Spec. vol. ix, p. 521.

that changes materially, or entirely, its signification. Its ordinary meaning, often renders but little aid in ascertaining its meaning when combined with other words. Every intransitive verb, may be joined with different prepositions, and each combination changes more or less its meaning, and sometimes its original import can hardly be recognized in its new position. So that the pupil must not only learn the meaning of the word in its ordinary use, but its import in each of the different phrases where it may be found. This secondary or conventional use of the word, is a more severe tax upon his memory, than its primary meaning. The following words will serve as examples: to beat, to beat down, (a wall, also a price,) to beat up, (for soldiers,) to beat out, (to extend, also to thresh,) to beat back, (an army,) to beat into, (to instil by repetition,) to beat against, (a rock,) to beat upon, to beat off, (to repel,) to beat about, (as a ship in a storm,); to act, to act upon, to act over, (to repeat,) to act under (authority,) to act out, (character,) to act from, (a motive,) to act for, (another,) to act against, (a rival,) to act with, (to co-operate,); to turn, to turn into, to turn out of, (office,) to turn up, to turn down, to turn away, (to dismiss,) to turn over, (to overset,) to turn off, (from a road, also to divert,) to turn aside, (to avert,) to turn on, (to retort,) to turn about, to turn back, (to retreat,); to make, to make a journey, to make an estate, to make a dinner, to make a difference, to make a story, to make a speech, to make hay, to make amends, to make account of, to make out, (an account, also to discover,) to make free with, to make over, (property,) to make away with, (to kill, or to destroy,) to make good, to make love, to make much or little of, to make up, (a quarrel,) to make sure of, to



make merry, to make sail, to make for, (to go toward,) to make up for, (to compensate,) to make trouble, to make as if, etc., etc.

Many words are used as nouns, and also as verbs, without change of form. To head, to face, to eye, to finger, to thumb, to toe, to plow, to saw, to hammer, to nail, are words of this class. After using these words, the pupil is very likely to take the same liberty with other similar words. Why not *ear* a song, as well as *eye* a picture? If he can *elbow* his companion, why not *lip* him, or *tooth* him? If he may *saw* a log of wood, why not *axe* a tree? We can only say to him, that usage allows some words to be treated in this way, and not others.

The termination of words is no certain guide to point out the class to which they belong. To master, to butcher, to doctor, to incense, to advance, to mention, to question, to station, to balance, to influence, to reverence, to pepper, to fester, to beggar, to fester, to wager, to lather, to slander, to canker, to shelter, to winter, etc., are nouns with the characteristic termination, which are also used as verbs. The following adjectives, with corresponding terminations, are used as nouns: missive, persuasive, sanative, laxative, sedative, individual, subsidiary, subordinate, supernumerary, anniversary, salutatory, catholic, epic, epileptic, etc.

The prefixes which are used to give a negative signification, are also not a little perplexing. Dis, prefixed to a word, conveys the idea of separation, or severance; thus, we say: mount, dismount; arm, disarm; connect, disconnect; appear, disappear. The pupil may not, however, go on to write: embrace, disembrace; attach, disattach; employ, disemploy. Il, prefixed to a word, generally expresses a negative. Illegal, means not legal, but illu-

minate, does not mean to shroud in darkness. We say illiberal, illegible, illegitimate; but not ill-learned, or ill-licensed. When facts warrant the expression, the pupil may write that a person is *unhorsed*, but under no circumstances may he write that he is *unassed*, *unwagoned*, or *uncoached*. The Lords of creation are sometimes *unmanned* by sudden affliction, but no accumulation of sorrow can *unwoman* the Ladies.

On the subject of derivation, the pupil can have little help, except from his memory. Under any rule that can be given him, the irregular will nearly equal the regular formations. For example, from light, and tight, we have to lighten, and to tighten, but from blight and right, we do not make to blighten, and to righten. From the verb deceive, we have the nouns, deceit and deception; from conceive, conceit, and conception; from receive, receipt and reception; and from perceive, only perception. From treat, and entreat, we make treaty and entreaty, but retreat and defeat, are used as nouns, without change of form. From the noun harmony, we have the verb harmonize; from colony, colonize; from agony, agonize; from scrutiny, scrutinize; from sympathy, sympathize; but no corresponding verbs are formed from irony, destiny, symphony, mutiny and felony. From the adjectives familiar and particular, we have familiarize and particularize; but regular and similar, do not give regularize and similarize. From fly, we have flight; from rely, reliance; from apply, application; from deny, denial; from reply, and supply, nouns of the same form. From moderate, we make moderation; from obstinate, obstinacy; from precipitate, precipitancy and precipitation; from accurate, accurateness

and accuracy. From vision, we have visionary; from nation, national; from relation, relative.

Many actions which are radically the same, have different names, according to circumstances. We receive a compliment, and take offence. We eat food, drink water, and *take* medicine. We guide a traveler, steer a vessel, and drive a horse. Roads are made, paper manufactured, engines constructed; a house is built, a ditch dug, a canal excavated, and a mine sunk.

We have pursued these illustrations far enough to show some of the difficulties which the structure of our language presents to the Deaf Mute, who attempts to acquire it. It is hardly necessary to say, that without judicious arrangement on the part of the teacher, and an active memory, sharp discrimination and constant vigilance on the part of the pupil, little progress will be made in overcoming them.

The peculiar character of the vernacular of the Deaf Mute, is another serious obstacle to his progress in the work he has in hand. This vernacular, is a language of ideas, and not of words and sentences. As has already been remarked, when he has so far advanced in his education that he can attach names to most of his ideas, these words are not arranged in his mind in the order of written language. Instead of the subject coming first, and the action, quality and object following, the object first attracts his attention, then its qualities, and afterward the other circumstances connected with it. It is not for him, in the first instance, to set down and sketch rapidly with his pen, his thoughts as they spontaneously arise in his mind. He must consider closely the proper grammatical form, and unless great care is exercised, his sentences are constantly running in the order of his thoughts.

We occasionally have pupils who learn words readily and accurately, and yet cannot master the order which they should take to express thought. The efforts which such pupils make in the way of composition, are not a little curious and amusing. They easily fill a slate or sheet with words of every description, which are generally correctly spelled and punctuated. Sometimes you can obtain a clue to the idea which was in the mind, and sometimes even this is impossible. But to reduce such a mass into properly arranged English, requires no little ingenuity. The compound, if it consisted of single letters instead of words, would very much resemble what printers denominate '*pi*,' and require about as much labor to restore to order. It should be borne in mind, however, that in all efforts at composition, the pupil has a double labor to perform; first he must attach a right meaning to his words, or rather, give his ideas the right names, and then give his sentence the proper arrangement. Nor does either process become easy and spontaneous, till his education has considerably advanced.

If the Deaf Mute has such formidable obstacles to encounter, before the pressure of his misfortune can be lightened, and he in a measure restored to society, and if he must meet these obstacles under such disadvantages, two things may be fairly demanded for him: first, that he be placed under the charge of teachers competent to guide him through the mazes of his journey; and next, that ample time be allowed him to accomplish the work. With regard to each of these particulars we are happy to say, that proper views are beginning extensively to prevail among the patrons of our different Institutions. We do not propose at present to remark on these points, and only

wish to advert to the period, which up to this time, the Deaf and Dumb have usually been under instruction, that we may form some estimate of the results attained, as satisfactory or otherwise.

The Asylum at Hartford, the oldest Institution in the country, had graduated up to May 1851, the close of the thirty-fourth year of its existence, somewhat over one thousand pupils. The average time which these children were under instruction, was four years. We have no data for judging of the time spent in this manner by the graduates of other Institutions. The average time in New York may be somewhat higher than this, and it is our impression that, in the Ohio Institution, it will be found to be somewhat less. For some years past, a certain portion of pupils in several Institutions, have been retained six or seven years, and a much larger class, perhaps nearly all, for five years.

The degree of proficiency which at the time of graduating, these children have attained in the use of language, has of course varied with the capacity of each, and the period of instruction. There is a class, though it is comparatively a small one, who from age, dullness of intellect, or other causes, have but little knowledge of connected language. They have usually a vocabulary more or less extended, so that they are familiar with the names of common objects; they generally understand, even when they cannot write, very simple questions, respecting their names, age, health, residence, etc., and also the purport of very simple language addressed to them; and more than all, their minds are well enlightened on religious subjects, and on subjects commonly known by persons of their age and capacity. This class are probably as much benefitted, in

proportion to their capacity and the time they remain under instruction, as any other who enjoy the privileges of our Institutions.

Another classification perhaps should be made, of those who, in some instances from want of ability, and in others from want of application, have hardly reached the line of respectable scholarship. The letters and compositions of these children, though they abound with all sorts of violations of grammar, are yet intelligible. The meaning they wish to express is easily seen, and they can communicate with their friends by writing with rapidity and ease. We cannot forbear the inquiry, how many of the children in the common schools of the country, as they have till within a few years been conducted, have risen above the mark here indicated?

Another class have acquired what may fairly be termed a good common education. In their knowledge of arithmetic, geography, history, etc., they will compare well with their companions who can hear and speak. They have sufficient education to fit them well for the ordinary duties of life. Though they may not use language with entire correctness, and the peculiar idioms of the Deaf and Dumb will be occasionally breaking out, their education restores them to social intercourse with their friends and to the easy use of newspapers and of books written in a plain style.

The last class that we mention, have acquired a free, correct, and sometimes an elegant use of language. In their knowledge of the higher branches of an English education, very few can excel them, and in their ready command of this knowledge, very few whose education has proceeded no further than theirs can compete with them. They are fully

prepared, as far as mental culture is concerned, to take their place with ease and credit in the intelligent and polished circles of their country.

The compositions appended to the annual reports of most of our Institutions, are fair specimens of the degree to which Deaf Mutes acquire the use of language. These pieces are professedly the original, unaided efforts of the pupils, and prefixed to each is usually the age of the writer, and the period he has been under instruction. The writers of these articles are usually the best scholars in their respective classes, but making all proper allowance for this, these productions are usually, in respect to thought, style and orthography, exceedingly honorable to their authors. We commend these specimens to the attention of intelligent persons who would see to what extent our Deaf Mutes actually overcome the difficulties upon which we have been remarking.

We entertain no Utopian ideas with regard to the end to be aimed at in the education of the Deaf Mute. We do not expect to fit him, in ordinary cases, for the life of a philosopher, a poet, or a statesman. Our great desire is, that education may bring him out of his native darkness and gloom, may instruct him in his relations to God and to his fellow-men, and make him an honorable and useful member of the social circle in which he moves. Instead of being a helpless and useless appendage to society, and dependent for the supply of his daily wants on the kindness of his friends, or on the cold charities of the world, we wish to see him an intelligent and productive member of the community of which he forms a part, prepared to enjoy its privileges and to share its burdens. If opportunity presents for him to rise above the condition in

which he was born, no iron heel of caste, or of ignorance should press him down, but the field should be as open to him for the full exercise of his energies, as to his more fortunate companions. But that he may have any chance, either for usefulness or happiness upon the arena of life, a good education is the least that can be done for him; and to secure this end, sufficient time should be allowed, and every requisite facility should be cheerfully furnished.









